

---

## Documentation

---

# Democratic senator endorses ABM plan

*The following excerpts are taken from a statement by Sen. Howell Heflin, Democrat of Alabama, on April 27, which appeared in the Congressional Record under the title, "Evolutionary Development of Strategic Defense Systems: A Concept Whose Time Has Come."*

Mr. President, I sincerely believe that an objective examination of President Reagan's recent call for the development of strategic defense systems will disclose that this is a concept whose time has come.

Once past the emotional reactions of those who are tied to the strategic doctrines of the past, this new approach may, indeed, lead to an ultimate reduction in offensive missiles on both sides.

For too long we have relied on strategic policy based on the threat of retaliation rather than a commitment to self-defense. I have wondered ever since the signing of the ABM treaty in 1972. . . . what could be more stabilizing than the ability to defend one's homeland against nuclear attack?

Yet, many of those who are most vocal through the media continue to insist that defense would touch off a new arms race by raising fears that one side was preparing to attack and then defend itself against retaliatory attack. Defense, in fact, is not provocative—it is the opposite. If each side neutralizes the other's offensive capability, the threat of aggression must be reduced. The U.S. history discloses proudly that ours is not an aggressor nation. But several times, we have been caught, with almost tragic results, with our guard down.

Still, there are numerous critics who suggest that ballistic missile defense (BMD) is destabilizing. Their arguments should be challenged not only on first principles, but on the grounds that major reductions in offensive weapons are made more feasible if such weapons are protected by BMD.

As I noted in my remarks in December, when the ABM treaty was negotiated it was assumed major reductions in offensive ballistic missile forces would be shortly forthcoming. Instead, the Soviets stepped up their strategic programs on all fronts and, today, our land-based ICBM force stands vulnerable to a first strike. Vulnerability, I submit, is the most provocative and destabilizing condition of all, encouraging, at the minimum, international adventures backed by the threat of a first strike.

The ABM Treaty permits limited deployment by both

sides, and the Soviets have a system deployed around Moscow. However, Congress decided in 1976 to phase out our deployed site at Grand Forks, South Dakota. Meanwhile, the Soviets have continued with a system-level program, at expenditures three times greater than ours, which we assume could be rapidly deployed in the future. The United States has pursued a modest R&D ballistic missile defense (BMD) program since the early 1970s, progressively developing means to defend our ground-based ICBM force and developing technologies which have provided remarkable advances for future defensive options.

I agree with President Reagan that we need to step up the pace of R&D on advanced long-range BMD concepts which fully challenge our Nation's creative scientific capabilities for success and breakthroughs as well as our political willingness to seek visionary solutions. In this connection, I was one of the first Members of this body to speak out on the potential use of directed energy technologies, such as high-energy lasers, for future defensive weapons.

In the future, we should be able to use ground-based or space-based, high-energy lasers to destroy ballistic missile targets, as well as other offensive targets. I have felt for some time that we need to accelerate our efforts in the development of this technology. However, one of my primary concerns has been the fragmentation and lack of coordination among the various Government agencies of the current research and development in the area of directed energy.

This concern was amplified as a result of hearings that I chaired in late 1979. The purpose of these hearings was to provide a broader review of the highly diverse, important, and rapidly developing laser technology. From these hearings, I determined that we did not have the proper environment to focus this technology. Therefore, in the last Congress, I introduced legislation calling for a Laser/Particle Beam Institute to provide a long-range program in this area and serve as a coordinating and managing body for those Government agencies involved in laser/particle beam research and development. . . .

The Science, Technology, and Space Sub-committee plans to conduct further hearings on this issue later this year. . . .

I am convinced that we should carefully and objectively evaluate the President's call for the development of strategic defensive systems as a means of making nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete. If we raise ourselves above partisanship, as indeed we must, and look with open minds at what could represent a more stabilizing strategic policy, I believe we will come to agree that this initiative can signal a change in America's strategic policy that is likely to live in history as a dramatic turning point toward world peace. It puts us on a course that is fundamentally more secure and humane.

I believe America's scientists and engineers, who have brought this Nation to preeminence in world technology and to the Moon and back, can succeed in developing the defensive systems to make this peaceful vision a reality.